# THE WORLD AT THE DOOR

BY PYTHIA S. PEAY

*More and more psychotherapists see a need to bring political, economic, and social issues into the therapy room.*

Around the age of 15, I made up my mind to become the first woman President of the United States. In pursuit of that goal, I later became an aide to the state governor's re-election campaign. However, when my soaring idealism came into contact with the back-room world of local politics, where business seemed to be conducted in secrets and whispers, my youthful ambition suffered a quick death. Yet the political issues of the time continued to exert their magnetic pull. Just as they did for so many people in the Baby Boom generation, the civil-rights, anti-Vietnam War, and feminist movements both actively engaged me and affected the course of my life. I dropped out of college, moved to California, and joined a spiritual group, where I lived in a communal household. Over the next decade, spiritual practice and shared housework commingled with human-rights and refugee work in an organic mix of the personal with the political.

When the furor of these movements subsided, I drifted further away from political issues. Gradually, my life's focus began to narrow: Family, career, and spiritual and psychological work were all I had time for. Living a suburban life, I yearned for a return of the spirit that had stirred the '60s. Like others I knew, I longed once again to engage in the political dramas of our time. But how? The familiar axiom that work on the inner world progresses naturally to a more healthy involvement with the outer world didn't seem to be unfolding quite so neatly. For me, psychology had been the antidote to a spirituality that had come to seem too removed from the "real" world. But now psychological work, although deeply enriching, seemed to be reinforcing the separation between myself and the body politic.

Fortunately, I had a therapist who honored, rather than felt threatened by, my changing values. In fact, my conflict reflected what some therapists have begun to address as the sociopolitical implications of a psychological worldview that is divided into "inner" and "outer." They argue that the emptiness that so many feel is intensified by therapy that locates suffering solely in the individual unconscious while ignoring the broader social context that is the deeper cause of our modern-day malaise. In this view, psychological healing that focuses only on one's interior can perpetuate the very alienation that therapy seeks to cure.

Many of these therapists feel a keen concern for what is going on in the world around them and the impact that such events have on their clients. They are personally engaged in specific issues such as the environment, gay and lesbian rights, poverty, and multiculturalism. Indeed, in a study he conducted of psychologists and psychoanalysts in seven countries, Jungian analyst Andrew Samuels, a professor at the University of Essex in London, found that 56 percent of respondents said they had discussed politics in the

clinical setting. Yet as Samuels and others point out, a scarcity of professional material exists to help guide clinicians through this terrain. For the most part, psychotherapists are taught to view such themes as symbolic of the patient's inner world, as defenses against painful emotions, or simply as casual chat, precursor to the "real stuff."

In his controversial 1992 book, *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World Is Getting Worse,* Jungian analyst James Hillman kicked the door open between the inner world of psychotherapy and the outer world of politics. How can despair and depression, Hillman asked, continue to be thought of as only the result of our wounded inner child when all around us the world is being savaged by poverty and environmental destruction?

Although Hillman's observations shocked many, they merely brought to light what had been on the fringes of mainstream psychology. Feminist psychologists, for instance, had led the vanguard in proving how society's suppression of women wreaked emotional damage. Similarly, the effects of oppression on minorities in colonial systems had been documented by the Algerian analyst Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth.* The revolutionary Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing wrote of how society's rigid adherence to the status quo contributed to madness. And one of American psychology's most revered thinkers, Robert J. Lifton, has written on how such events as the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki traumatized the modern psyche.

As respected as these thinkers are, however, investigation into the impact of sociopolitical forces on the individual psyche is still a rarity in both the teaching and practice of psychotherapy. Perhaps because of issues such as economic downsizing and the tensions of an increasingly multicultural society, however, the need for a therapy that addresses the social, economic, and political realms is moving to the forefront.

## Therapeutic Activism

Psychiatrist James Gordon, director of the Center for Mind-Body Medicine in Washington, D.C., and the author of *Manifesto for a New Medicine,* recalls that the reason he was drawn to work with his first therapist, Robert Coles, was because Coles was a "political therapist." It was 1965, and Gordon had already spent time in the South with civil-rights workers. Coles's efforts to understand the impact on children caught in the crossfire of desegregation would eventually earn him national recognition. To Gordon, Coles's struggle for social justice placed him in the same lineage as Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson—psychotherapists who were concerned not only with what went on in the therapy office but with the political world as well. At that time, Gordon says, he already had "serious questions" about what he saw as the narrowness of psychotherapy. In fact, he considers the biomedical model underlying psychiatry and psychology, which locates disease and problems in one person, to be a mistake. "No other culture has ever seen things that way," he says. "They've always seen illness or emotional problems as a reflection of the difficulties that coexist between a person and the larger world—the social, natural, and spiritual."

*Politics has become so segregated from psychology, according to Jungian analyst Andrew Samuels, that "it's more acceptable for a clinician to work with a sex killer than with someone who holds politically repulsive ideas."*

Gordon believes we've come to a dangerous pass when, for instance, an individual's reaction to a homeless person is seen as solely a psychological matter: "If you see someone on the street, you *ought* to be upset by it—if you're not, you're in trouble Then the question becomes: Wha are you going to *do* about it?"

Psychologist Lane Gerber of Seattle University agrees. In his article "Intimate Politics" in the journal *Psychotherapy,* he relates the story of a woman who came in for her appointment upset over an encounter with a homeless woman and her daughter on the street. After talking it over for a few minutes, his client objected that she wasn't in therapy to discuss homelessness. Rather than drop the topic, however, Gerber gently kept the conversation focused on her reaction to the homeless woman. He asked his client to elaborate on why a topic like homelessness would not fall in the province of therapy, pointing out that perhaps there was a parallel between her feelings that no one in her environment listened to her and the invisibility of the homeless person. But rather than focus only on intrapsychic similarities, Gerber also took seriously her genuine response to a social problem.

Over the course of many sessions, the client confronted her feelings of helplessness and abandonment, yet her encounter with the homeless woman remained a vivid touchstone. Eventually, with Gerber's support, she felt empowered to act on her despair over homelessness, initiating a conversation with the homeless woman and bringing her blankets. Gerber quotes his client as saying to him, "I couldn't do the same thing to her that was done to me." Ultimately, the client became an activist in her town, advocating for a local shelter.

Gordon considers political activism to be a kind of therapeutic intervention. "While it should never be forced on people as a matter of ideology, it's clear that some people have an unmet need to reach out to others," he explains. Not having an effect on the larger world is, in his view, "a genuine psychological dilemma for many people today. Thus, part of their growth is to find their role in the larger body politic."

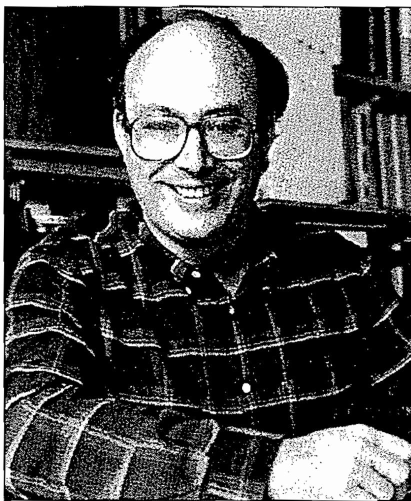
In her work with cancer patients, Philadelphia clinical psychologist and Jungian analyst-in-training Diane Perlman notes that activism promotes not only psychological but

also physical health. Drawing on the research of psychologist Martin Seligman, coauthor of *Learned Helplessness,* Perlman says that conditions of helplessness have been shown to lead to a suppression of the body's immune system. She also cites studies proving that those cancer patients do best who challenge their physicians' advice—who in fact have the "worst" relationships with their doctors. What such research tells us, she says, is that "life is not about *not* having stress but about having stress and responding to it actively."

For example, Perlman continues, the passivity that patients succumb to when diagnosed with cancer is the same frozen state of psychic numbness that many in society feel when confronted with the magnitude of social problems. But avoiding despair through "numbing out" the pain can block activism and deepen depression. Studies of children who suffered from nightmares about nuclear attack, she says, showed that their fears were often alleviated after they were encouraged to write letters to the President or to Congress. Many of her thoughts on activism as an antidote to depression were inspired by the 1989 student takeover of China's Tiananmen Square. As she watched Chinese youths erect their own statue of liberty—the goddess of democracy—it seemed to her that the students' dramatic cry for freedom reflected the natural human urge toward growth and life.

Indeed, one of the major purposes of psychotherapy, according to Washington, D.C., psychologist and Jungian analyst-in-training Alan Vaughan, who teaches at the American School of Professional Psychology in Virginia, is "the education and empowerment of the self." But, says Vaughan, who is also a lawyer and has acted as a forensic consultant to the District of Columbia, "to go out into the world and become a self-actualized individual requires dealing with power, strategy, and laws." Therapy aids in this process by encouraging people to clarify their value systems—the personal equivalent, Vaughan says, of the law. Because there is often a conflict between our beliefs and the lives we lead, there is an inevitable "politicization around gaining the power to make our dreams happen in the world," he says. "Not fearing our freedom and power to effect strategies in the legal or economic system is what it means to be an adult."

Becoming empowered to make changes in the world doesn't necessarily mean that a person has to run for Congress. But, Vaughan says, "you can join a group that has a voice and agenda around issues that are important to you." Political activism could even mean changing one's profession to a career that is more in line with one's personal ethics. Often, Vaughan says, people can be guided in this process by decoding messages from their dreams and their unconscious that can help them move out into the world, "finding groups that embody their dreams."



Andrew Samuels.

## A Broader Terrain

Many psychotherapists are satisfied simply to allow space for sociopolitical topics within the therapy session, honoring their clients' feelings rather than tuning them out. Yet some practitioners have deliberately shifted their focus to make it easier for such material to surface. In his preliminary interview with new patients, for instance, Lane Gerber says that, along with the usual questions concerning family and work, he inquires whether there are events going on in the world that provoke a disturbing reaction. Responses to the question usually vary, he says, as "some are surprised, others are relieved, and still others don't respond at all." Just asking the question, however, "has changed what I hear and what people talk about." It's not so much that he and his clients discuss political candidates, he explains, but that an added importance is given to how we live our lives in a world where there is pollution, violence, racism, and economic greed.

Psychologist Philip Cushman, author of *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy,* says that he has recast his own therapy techniques along more historical lines. While he doesn't omit personal family dynamics, he says he no longer "locates struggles or conflict inside a person's skin." Rather, he considers such problems as existing within the social realms that are all around us. Thus, when a patient enters his office, Cushman visualizes a terrain extending on all sides: "I try to get a sense of that terrain and where things are located. I wonder what positions people occupy in that person's world, what position they will place me in, and where they place themselves. I ask: What is there room for in this terrain, and what is there no space to include?" He also considers the impact that cultural constructs such as capitalism, self-contained individualism, and ideas about gender may have upon his patient.

We are constantly influencing one another in the social realms, Cushman believes. Thus, while patients who accuse their therapists of not listening may have had parents who ignored them, they may also inhabit an uncaring *world.* In his view, therapy is an interactive process, with the client's environment influencing the therapeutic relationship and vice versa.

Cushman's integration of the social with the psychological is one that has also been explored by New York City psychoanalyst Neil Altman in his work in inner-city public clinics. Psychoanalysis especially, Altman says, has mostly been confined to white, upper-middle-class people. And because class and race are largely invisible to this homogeneous segment of society, those issues rarely

intrude into the therapy hour. Traditional analytic concepts such as anonymity and neutrality further reinforce the split between the private and public spheres. But for those on the margins of society, social factors like economic conditions and ethnicity are only too palpably present. Maintaining objective anonymity is difficult for a therapist under circumstances where, says Altman, he or she must attend to a patient's personal life: approving bus fare to and from the clinic, say, or negotiating with social-service agencies.

Rather than dismiss the potential for inner-city psychoanalysis, however, Altman has used his experience to broaden the way it is traditionally practiced. In his book *The Analyst in the Inner City,* he explains his shift from the traditional "one person" perspective—in which the realm of therapy is thought to consist only of the mind of the client, with the analyst acting as scientific observer—to a more relational "three person" approach. In this model, therapeutic healing takes place in the interaction between therapist and client. But it also includes the way in which the social context of each affects the exchange and may even get acted out in therapy.

In his book Altman describes his own feelings of resentment and envy toward a wealthy client who forgot to pay his bill. He felt disregarded by his client, for whom money didn't seem to be an issue and who assumed it wasn't for Altman, either. On the other hand, Altman writes that he was perceived as the one with "status and money" by some inner-city clients who saw him as a representative of "the entire welfare system." This perception fed into requests from patients that he advocate on their behalf for more benefits, car fare, even food. Altman writes that although these interactions could be interpreted strictly psychologically—as manifestations of "oral neediness," for instance—they are also a "powerful enactment of social class issues in the therapeutic space." How can one pretend to be fully engaged in the therapeutic process, he asks, unless such factors are "understood as meaningful aspects of the experience between patient and analyst?" And while he says that psychoanalysis will never meet the needs of large numbers of people, his hope is that such adjustments can help it avoid the pitfalls of elitism.

Still, Altman's orientation is always focused on the therapeutic relationship. As an illustration, he recalls how, as a young man, he had the worst argument he ever had with his father over Vice President Hubert Humphrey's support of President Lyndon Johnson during the Vietnam War. His father, who was against the war, was a personal friend of Humphrey's

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and felt that the Vice President had been obligated to support Johnson. When Altman disagreed, his father was outraged. The issue was important to Altman, he recalls, "not just for political reasons but because it was a part of my self-definition. I belonged to a generation that was trying to change the world and that put a high value on sticking to your principles." In the same way, he says, patients who bring up political issues may be doing so not just to discuss the issues but also to test whether the analyst recognizes their values.

This does not mean that Altman conceals his own views, however. If, for example, a client is strongly in favor of more stringent immigration reform, Altman, who identifies himself as politically liberal, says that he would respond honestly that he is against legislation that denies welfare benefits to immigrants. This discussion might then lead into one about such issues as ruthlessness and compassion. Yet Altman says he would also attempt to understand his client's views: resentment against having to pay higher taxes to accommodate those from elsewhere, for instance. Ultimately, Altman says he strives to keep the focus on the personal meaning that such issues have for the client, exploring how he or she may have arrived at such a position.

The objection that a therapist might risk indoctrinating his patients with his own values is one that Andrew Samuels says he takes seriously. But, he notes, "suggestion is already a part of therapy. The values of the therapist affect all the work." Like Altman and Cushman, Samuels believes that therapy is a process of "mutual influencing" between therapist and client. Furthermore, he questions how value-laden topics like marriage or sexual orientation—therapy's usual fare—differ from political issues.

Indeed, to many psychotherapists, the notion that strict neutrality can be maintained in the therapy session is a myth. Keeping politics out in order to avoid indoctrination, they say, is simply maintaining an artificial boundary. Politics has become so segregated from psychology, according to Samuels, that "it's more acceptable for a clinician to work with a sex killer than with someone who holds politically repulsive ideas." Thus, rather than strive for an impossible objectivity, these practitioners say that the more critical issue is how to handle extreme ideological differences. How should a liberal-minded psychologist deal with a fundamentalist Christian client who believes that homosexuality is a perversion because the Bible says so? Or what of a Jewish psychoanalyst whose client is antisemitic?

Altman, who is Jewish, responds that "there are some people who are so abhorrent that you can't work with them." He would find it impossible, for instance, to work with a client who wanted to convert Jews. However, he considers that case different from the client who hates Jews yet wonders why he or she feels that way. "I'm not going to turn that person away," he says, "because I could find those feelings in myself—and if I can't, I'm not being honest." When training his students to handle material that may be

personally unacceptable to them, Samuels suggests that they explore the issue from a historical perspective. If a client expresses racist opinions, for example, he recommends examining what circumstances in that person's life may have shaped his or her prejudice, rather than voicing reproof. To Samuels, it isn't so much that politics is a means to change the way therapy has been practiced, but that existing theories of psychology can be used to confront the previously taboo area of politics.

As an African American, Alan Vaughan is no stranger to the way racism affects therapy. Even in the first few minutes of a client's initial visit, he says, he is aware of where a client stands on the issue of race. It is then that Vaughan gets a gut-level feeling for a client's comfort level regarding working with an African American therapist. If much discomfort is evident, Vaughan will try to address unspoken fears in the first session. If his new client has had personal exposure to people of color, he says, this may be an easy situation to defuse. If not, it may be too overwhelming for the client to deal with issues of race on top of working out what brought him or her to therapy in the first place.

A person's decision to enter into an interracial analytic relationship, however, implies a willingness to work on unconscious attitudes around race, continues Vaughan, who explains that "racial complexes" frequently show up in dreams. A white client, perhaps, will dream of black men, or a Hispanic will dream of Euro-Americans. For members of all ethnic groups, the appearance of figures of another race in dreams can signify an alien aspect of themselves that needs to be integrated. Or the images may reflect internalized cultural attitudes toward other races. One Hispanic male client, for example, held negative stereotypes about black men, yet once the man embraced his own Hispanic identity more fully, Vaughan says, he felt more deeply connected to Vaughan. He then began to transfer these positive feelings to other African Americans, with whom he gradually developed more intimate relationships.

## History and a Multicultural Society

If mainstream psychotherapy has relegated politics to the fringe of what's typically discussed in the therapy hour, so has it unintentionally marginalized nonmainstream segments of society. Especially when it comes to family dynamics, many people from other cultures have had a different historical experience than those of a Eurocentric background. Indeed, says Vaughan, for the very reason that class and culture are so rarely brought up, "a lot of people of color won't go into therapy with white people. They feel they end up paying [the therapists] and educating them at the same time."

Alan Vaughan.

Just the notion of a "nuclear" family, for instance, says Vaughan, is itself a Euro-American concept. West African families, as well as those of almost all other cultures in the world, he notes, are based on widely extended family systems. "There are no two-parent, 2.2-kid families," he says. Slavery's devastating effects further activated the extended family as a support system. Additionally, an in-depth analysis of an African American's relationship with his or her parents is bound to be culturally relative, as wounds stemming from parental deprivation are inextricably linked to racial and economic oppression.

But Vaughan, who has made a study of U.S. immigration patterns, points out that this is true for other ethnic groups as well. Whether Chinese who were forced into coolie labor on the railroads, Native Americans placed on reservations, or Japanese interned in camps during World War II, he says, "political and economic experiences conditioned the ability of parents to provide good nurturing." Therapists who are aware of the historical dimensions of their patients' problems, Vaughan points out, are better able to do psychological work on an individual level.

Fred Bemak, chairman of the Department of Counseling at Johns Hopkins University, concurs with Vaughan's observations. Studies show, he says, that at least 50 percent of minority therapy clients don't return for second sessions. Although there are no research studies to show why this is so—as it is difficult to follow up on those who don't return—he and his colleagues hypothesize that it is because the mental-health profession has fallen short in "addressing the politics and social realities of these situations."

Indeed, the recent influx of immigrants, many of whom have suffered political torture, has forced the mental-health profession to cultivate greater sensitivity to sociopolitical issues. Often, tragedy results from cross-cultural misunderstandings. Bemak points out that under the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, for instance, people who drew attention to themselves were killed; therefore, many Cambodians learned not to look anyone directly in the eye. Like one client of Bemak's—a young Cambodian whose mother had been murdered in front of him and who couldn't confront the killers lest he risk being killed himself—many refugees enact the same behavior in the clinical setting. As Bemak says he has observed, the therapist who fails to inquire about a client's political past may misinterpret such avoidance of eye contact as withdrawal. In a worst-case scenario, the immigrant may be misdiagnosed, hospitalized, and unnecessarily given medication.

Bemak emphasizes that it isn't just the personal trauma of, say, the client whose mother was murdered that needs to be considered but also the entire political situation: the sol-

diers, the local village, and the government. For as politics continues to be ignored, he says, mental-health care is "becoming a crazy system where there's no recognition of the need for intervention based on political and cultural realities." To address the situation, he is introducing cross-cultural training into his department at Johns Hopkins that would encourage more awareness of the impact of social and organizational change on individual psychological well-being. This is occurring through an "infusion" at all levels of the curriculum: in textbooks, theories, and the requirement for interns to do projects across ethnic and cultural lines to help enhance their awareness.

For his part, Vaughan is initiating a journal at his school that would give in-depth information to practitioners in this area. A therapist's sociopolitical sensitivity, he says, would be enhanced, for example, if he or she had a source to refer to that would give information on the current economic, religious, political, and social backgrounds of multiracial clients.

## Discovering a Political Myth

For many people, the impersonality of politics prevents them from taking an activist stance. They'd like to help change the world, but in what way? Without the personal spark of passion—the soul cry that stirs a person to action—political engagement can seem a lifeless endeavor.

Drawing on techniques of Depth Psychology, Andrew Samuels has devised a theory by which individuals can tap into buried sources of political energy. Samuels began his research into this topic during the Persian Gulf War, when he found more and more patients bringing war imagery into their sessions with him. Often, he would notice that while some used the war as a means to discuss what was going on with them internally, others needed to work out their feelings regarding these large-scale events. What if, he wondered, "in addition to sexual energy, moral energy, aggressive energy, and spiritual energy, there also exists political energy that flows through the veins of human beings?"

Over time, he grew increasingly aware of how people's emotional lives were imprinted by political crises—even those that occurred at great geographical remove. Whether the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger,* or the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, world tragedies strike major chords in the drama of our individual lives. According to Samuels, "the fantasies, dreams, bodily reactions, and nonrational responses" provoked by world trauma need to be both "honored and decoded."

**Clinical psychologist Diane Perlman believes that political activism promotes not only psychological but also physical health.**

The observation that people react strongly to world events may seem an obvious one. But Samuels points out that not so apparent is how the official world of politics—even citizens themselves—dismiss their gut-level reactions as irrelevant to the political process. And all too often, psychology only mirrors such attitudes by denying these feelings their importance. As Samuels sees it, therapy holds the potential to help clients translate "passionately held convictions—what we might call political dreams—into practical realities." To this end, he has developed a series of experiential exercises that can enable people to discover what he calls their "political myth."

First, Samuels asks clients to rank on a scale of 1 to 10 those figures who influenced their views in childhood: mother, father, aunts, uncles, or other adults such as teachers or religious figures. As I asked myself these questions, for example, I realized how much I had been influenced by my mother and aunt, who were both from Argentina. Although I grew up in the Midwest, I heard many stories throughout my youth about my aunt, who had remained in a politically unstable country: the terrorist bomb that caused her to have a miscarriage, for instance, and her admiration for American democracy.

Samuels also recommends that clients rate the political energy of the environment they grew up in. Did their parents foster or hinder their political development? Did their mother and father have differing levels of political interest? What about the street they lived on or the town they grew up in? It's not unusual, says Samuels, for people to have a relatively high level of political energy—say, a 6 or an 8—yet to have grown up in a suburb where the political energy was about a 2. Samuels also asks people to assess the political energy of their times: The charged atmosphere during World War II or the '60s, for example, would differ dramatically from other, more peaceful periods.

Last, Samuels uses a key concept in psychoanalysis—the "primal scene" of one's parents in bed—to show the degree to which early family politics shapes one's political identity. "All the great emotional themes of the image of our parents in bed are political," says Samuels. One parent, for example, may have the power to exclude or dominate the other. Conversely, their interaction may be harmonious. Or the "closed bedroom door" may cause feelings of social marginalization in the child. The primal-scene imagery is not static but changes over time, he says, reflecting the changes that may be occurring in our own political individuation. (See box, opposite page.)

What about those individuals who have no images of their parents' intimate relationship? Although he hesitates to draw a precise causal connection, Samuels says, "If a person can't imagine their parents' sex-

ual relationship—especially if they know that they had one—they might have great difficulty handling political conflict, or even getting involved in politics at all." The underlying puritanism of American culture may also play a role, because "if the culture doesn't allow you to have sexy images of your parents, then ideological conflict becomes difficult to sustain." As portrayed in the Jungian image of the *hieros gamos,* or sacred marriage, Samuels explains, "images of one's parents' relationship—or our genesis—are about much more than the facts of life. Sexuality, which is so private, and politics, which is so public, symbolize each other."

The ability to sustain conflict and tension is common to both sexual relationships and political involvement, he continues. Thus, the image of the parents in bed symbolizes the union of irreconcilable opposites—whether on a sociopolitical level, such as rich and poor, or on the personal level of male and female. As this image changes over time, it reflects the psyche's capacity to cope with both the unity and the diversity of a given political situation. Quoting Aristotle, Samuels says, "Similars do not a state make."

If more individuals began to cultivate their political identity, would it offset what some criticize as society's tendency to overanalyze its leaders? Jungian analyst Tom Singer, chair of extended education at the C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco, believes that it might. Powerless in the face of overwhelming social problems, many people find it easier to assess the character of President Clinton, for instance, than to assume the burdens of citizenship. "The problem with such an approach," says Singer, "is that it shifts the debate toward our leaders and their strengths and weaknesses, rather than who we are as citizens." While the character of our leaders is important, he says, focusing on that takes us away from more serious issues at hand: economic disparity, racial conflict, and the growing lack of civility.

The gap between politics and psychology, says Singer, is a difficult one to bridge. After a conference he hosted last fall with New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley, entitled "Myth, Politics, and the Psyche," Singer says it became clear to him "how hard it is to have a psychological discourse simultaneously with a political discourse." The expedient and practical, he asserts, "do not mix easily or naturally with the symbolic and inner."

Still, psyche and politics are so unconsciously entwined that, he says, we might think of them as bound together in an "unholy marriage" of conflicting archetypes. However complicated the task, he believes it is important to continue to articulate the similarities and differences that exist in the tension between them.

Indeed, the ongoing attempts by thinkers to understand more fully the dynamic between the political and the psychological call to mind that adage from the '60s: The personal is the political—and the political is the personal. As we stand uncertainly at the gateway to the new millennium, for many of us it is ever more crucial to rekindle the flame of activism. If politics can be seen as a fateful Shakespearean drama, psychology is the director defining the roles we will play.

## Your Parents and Your Politics

To do Andrew Samuels's exercise comparing one's experience of the "primal scene" and one's political identity, divide a sheet of paper vertically. On the lefthand side, list your earliest memory or fantasy of your parents' physical intimacy; the same at adolescence; and the same today. In the righthand column, list your memory of the first time you became aware of political conflict; your politics at adolescence; and the same today. Then consider how these two columns—parental intimacy and politics—may reflect each other.

I asked Samuels to comment on my own experiential "test results." My earliest memory of my parents was around the age of six or seven, when I happened upon them kissing in bed; embarrassed, I ran and hid behind a door. Opposite that recollection, my earliest political memory was of the 1964 presidential election between Barry Goldwater and Lyndon Johnson, when I sided with my dad in favor of Goldwater. To Samuels, this seemed obvious enough: Because I was embarrassed by the fact that my parents "had" each other, aligning with my father's politics was one way of securing him for myself. Also, something in the earliest formation of my political self conspired to create a kind of shyness around my politics.

During my adolescence, my parents had begun to fight a lot, and my mother was unhappy. It was around that time, as I marked on the opposite side of the sheet, that I set my sights on becoming the first woman President. As Samuels commented, my political ambitions might have reflected my sensitivity to my mother's oppression and a desire to fight her battles—although by being politically conservative, I could still remain my father's ally.

My last memory of my parents, who had been divorced for more than 20 years, was two years ago, as my father was dying. Through the intercession of his hospice and a relative, my parents were able to make their peace with each other, ending years of bitterness. By that time, my politics had grown increasingly liberal and I had begun to feel keenly the need to find some way to become reinvolved with social issues. Samuels wondered whether a "quest for a satisfactory multiculturalism," or some other form of reconciliation work, had become part of my politics. In fact, I had just undertaken to write a book based on psychologists' analysis of America's most pressing problems.

—*P.S.P.*

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